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Abortion aftermath can cause infertility

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Unexplained infertility in otherwise healthy women may sometimes be caused by the presence of fetal bone fragments left embedded in the uterus after a previous abortion, according to a new report that offers a novel approach to solving the problem.

Evidence has been accumulating for years that small pieces of fetal bone can sometimes get left behind after an abortion, causing a chronic irritation in the uterus that can interfere with subsequent pregnancies.

Sometimes the bone fragments can be seen with a hysteroscope, a tube with a tiny camera at the end that allows a doctor to look inside the uterus. But many such cases of infertility go undiagnosed and unexplained.

Now a new case report, published in the April issue of the journal *Fertility and Sterility*, helps explain the difficulty in recognizing this problem. Doctors at the University of Ottawa found that, in some cases, these bone fragments can work their way into the muscular uterine lining, making them invisible even with a hysteroscope.

The doctors describe a 36-year-old woman who had ended a pregnancy 15 years earlier and was not able to become pregnant again. Her uterus appeared normal by hysteroscope. But when doctors conducted an ultrasound examination, which uses sound waves to visualize dense objects in the body, they saw bright white evidence of embedded bone fragments.

Using the ultrasound images to guide them, the doctors scraped the uterine lining and removed the fragments. Four months later, the woman became pregnant and went on to deliver a healthy boy.

It is not clear how often abortions result in such complications, but the doctors note that any fetus at least 12 weeks old can have bony tissue. In previous studies, they say, virtually all women who had such fragments removed were able to get pregnant soon afterward.